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C O N F I D E N T I A L KATHMANDU 000133

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SA/INS
LONDON FOR POL - GURNEY
NSC FOR MILLARD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/20/2014

TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PTER](#) [NE](#)

SUBJECT: NEPAL: ARMY LAUNCHES AIR STRIKE AGAINST REPORTED
MAOIST MEETING SITE

Classified By: DCM ROBERT K. BOGGS. REASON: 1.5 (B,D).

1. (C) The Director of Military Operations (DMO) of the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) has confirmed that on January 20 the RNA conducted an air strike against a site in the remote mid-western district of Jajarkot, where the Maoists were reportedly holding a large rally. According to the RNA source, the air operation lasted approximately 10-15 minutes, during which time 36 "bombs" (most likely 81mm or 82 mm mortar rounds) were dropped by helicopter from an improvised weapons system. The RNA did not launch a ground operation to support the air strike, and, as of COB January 21, has been unable to move forces to the site to assess the battle damage. Forces are expected to reach the area on foot by early morning January 22. The RNA was unable to offer any information on possible casualties.

2. (U) The local press reported that on January 20 the RNA launched an air strike against the site of a large Maoist gathering, convened to celebrate the announcement of the "People's Autonomous Government of the Bheri-Karnali Zone." (Note: The Bheri-Karnali zones cover the mid-west and extreme north-western districts and include some of the most remote and least developed areas in Nepal. End note.) The reports, claiming that numerous villagers had been forced to attend the rally, speculated that "dozens" may have been killed in the attack. Press accounts also relayed unconfirmed (and to us, highly unlikely) reports that Maoist ideologue and Central Committee member Dr. Baburam Bhattarai had attended the meeting and that the RNA had launched the attack in an effort to kill him.

3. (U) On January 21 the Maoist web site claimed that an air strike conducted by "the Royal American Army" had missed the site of the meeting, hitting instead the home of a local resident, killing one villager, injuring two others, and destroying several water buffalo. (Note: Recent Maoist diatribes have derided the Royal Nepal Army as the "Royal American Army." End note.) Predictably, the statement on the web site alleged that the rally was a grand success, drawing thousands of loyal and flag-waving supporters, and that the Maoist militia had "driven away" RNA ground forces purportedly brought in to support the air strike. The account quoted Maoist Central Committee member Krishna Bahadur Mahara, who reportedly attended the meeting, as declaring that the "time has come to move to the cities from the villages."

4. (SBU) INSEC, a local human rights NGO with district chapters throughout Nepal, told us that a representative from one of its regional offices had attended the Maoist rally and basically corroborated most of the account on the insurgents' web site. According to that source, the RNA bombs dropped from a helicopter had fallen about one hour's walk to the west of the site of the meeting, killing a villager. In contrast to the Maoist claims of repelling RNA ground forces, the INSEC representative said that no RNA ground troops came near the site of the meeting.

5. (C) Comment: Unlike the Maoists, the RNA has refrained from making official public statements regarding the air strike. Until we have the RNA's battle damage assessment, it will remain difficult to judge which of the various conflicting versions seems likeliest. We find it highly unlikely that someone of Bhattarai's stature, who ranks second in the insurgents' hierarchy, would agree to undergo either the considerable risks to his personal safety or the considerable inconvenience to his personal comfort involved in traveling to this difficult, inaccessible part of the Maoist heartland so far from his recent sanctuary in northern India. If, as the press seemed to indicate, the RNA action was prompted by intelligence that Bhattarai might have been present, it seems equally unlikely, given the primitive nature of the weaponry apparently used in the attack, that an RNA air assault could have had the technical accuracy needed to target Bhattarai, Mahara or any other senior Maoist who might have been in attendance.

MALINOWSKI